

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSING COMMITTEE

Kathryn L Braun - MARCH 10, 2022

Oppose H.B. 5204 –AN ACT CONCERNING A NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND FAIR SHARE PLANS FOR MUNICIPALITIES TO INCREASE AFFORDABLE HOUSING.

Senator Lopes, Representative Williams, Senator Cicarella, Representative Polletta, and members of the committee, my name is Kathryn Braun. I am a lifelong environmentalist, an attorney and a Zoning Commissioner in the Town of Fairfield. I do not speak for any Zoning Commission or group.

I oppose HB 5204. This bill along with other bills restricting home rule and public participation would be devastating for open space and historic preservation, both already under siege from CGS 8-30g. The usurping of local authority to regulate land within a municipality is no less than a degradation of the legislative capacity of each Town's Zoning Commission, rendering it an inferior legislative agency.

Land is a scarce resource and requires equal status under the law to the need for housing development. There can and must be alternate, creative means to address housing issues that do not impose development mandates without local control.

H.B. 5204 is both too vague and too burdensome. First, an as yet unknown team will be selected to advise the Secretary of Policy and Management (OPM) and the State Housing Commissioner. This group omits most land use stakeholders and experts that should have a seat at the table- such as environmentalists, historians, home owner groups, municipal finance advisors, local zoning officials, real estate professionals, etc. Then, this group will create a formula to impose quotas on Towns which could mandate the development of hundreds or even thousands of units of new housing stock without considering all relevant factors critical to land use planning. The formula would use a comparison of certain factors (grand list, residents' income, existing apartment buildings) while ignoring others (built environment, infrastructure, sewer capacity, natural resources, open space preservation, historical assets, climate change threats, school capacity, etc.)

Please do not allow housing development mandates to jeopardize our most fragile and precious of resources, our land. Do not pass a law that leaves decision making for permanent land use planning to non-elected officials using as-yet undeveloped methodologies. Vote NO on HB 5204.